REMARKS

Claims 1-20 and 70-72 remain pending. Reconsideration of the patent application is respectfully requested. Pursuant to the Notice of Non-Compliant amendment, the claim numbering now properly reflects the previous cancellation of claims 21-69.

Claims 1-20 were rejected under 35 USC § 103(a) as obvious over PCT WO 01/21101 A1 in view of Chionard (U.S. Patent No. 6,156,064). The rejected independent claim 1 calls for a mandrel to first be coated with a polymer after which a series of individual expandable rings are mounted thereon to form an assembly that is subsequently dip coated. The mandrel is then removed to leave a fully polymer-encapsulated stent. None of the methods of either reference, alone or in combination, suggest such a method and are incapable of producing a similar structure. The primary reference merely provides for introducing a polymer into the space defined between the interior surface of a cover and the exterior surface of a mandrel that accommodates circular members or rings therein. This necessarily precludes full encapsulation as the polymer cannot coat those surfaces of the rings that are in contact with the mandrel or with the cover. In deed, it is taught that liquid material is only applied to small segments 19 of rings 18 (page 12, line 33 and page 13, line 3). Simply dip coating the assembly of rings, even when devoid of the outer cover, would not yield a fully polymer-encapsulated stent as any contact between the inner surfaces of the rings with the mandrel would preclude the intrusion of polymer therebetween. The secondary reference does not offer a solution to such problem as the reference fails to address the problem of fully encapsulating a collection of individual stent rings that are arranged on a mandrel. The dip coating process described at column 9, line 19 requires the stent to already have a self-supporting structure, i.e. any rings would already have to be linked in order to maintain their relative alignment and spacing during the dip coating process.

While reliance on a mandrel is described with respect to the spray coating process (column 10, line 11) the problem of introducing polymer between the stent and the mandrel is not in any way recognized let alone addressed. The application of a release agent to the mandrel would clearly not provide for the full encapsulation of the stent by the spray coating process or by a dip coating process. Independent claim 1 was amended slightly to further emphasize this distinction.

It is respectfully submitted that in view of the fact that neither reference addresses the problem associated with forming a stent from individual stent rings by fully encapsulating, a solution to such problem cannot be considered obvious thereover.

Applicants gratefully acknowledge the finding of allowable subject matter in claims 19 and 20. Applicants assume the rejection of claims "1-20" was in error and should have read "claims 1-18." New claims 70-72 all depend from independent claim 1.

In light of the above remarks, applicants earnestly believe the application to now be in condition for allowance and respectfully request that it be passed to issue.

Respectfully submitted,

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